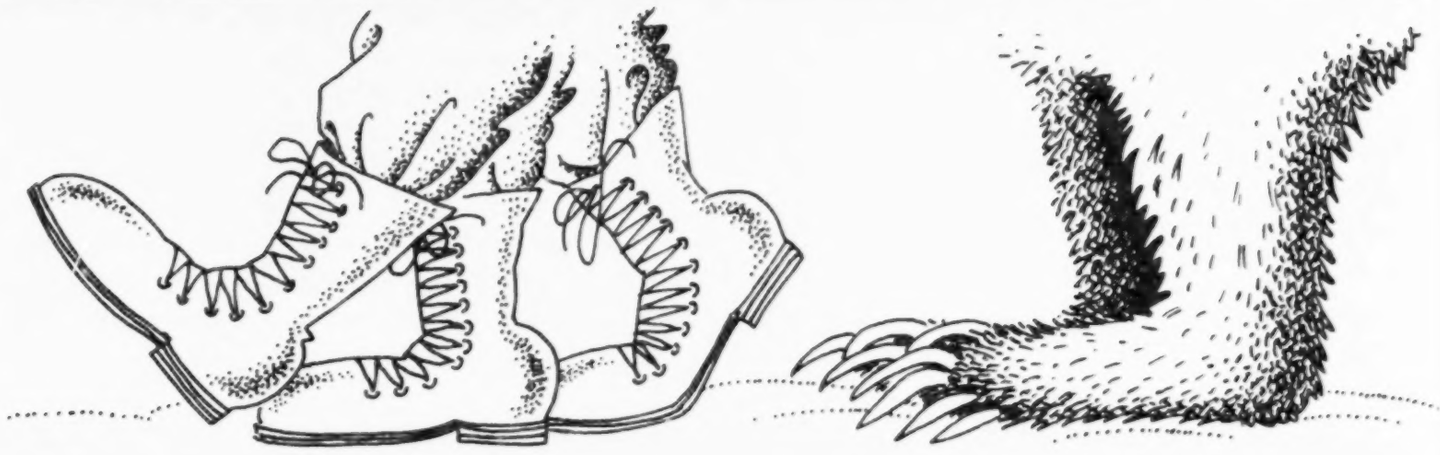
ALLS

Alaska National Parklands

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

3 STEPS TO BEAR SAFETY



YOU ARE IN BEAR COUNTRY

Grizzly and brown bears are an important part of the wilderness you have come to explore. Either bear can kill you, but you can take precautions that will greatly reduce the risk. Three things are essential...1) you must plan your trip to minimize chances of trouble with bears, 2) prevent meeting bears in close quarters, and 3) know what to do if you actually do meet a bear.

This brochure tells you how to do those three things. Read it before you go. One careless person can endanger your whole group, so make sure everyone in your party is familiar with this information and follows the suggested practices. With a healthy respect for bears, your trip through the spectacular country they inhabit should be safe and memorable.

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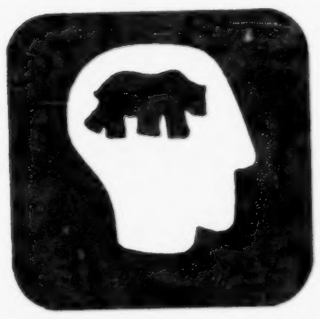
1. PLAN AHEAD



Odors attract bears. Thoroughly clean your pack, clothing and other gear in an unscented detergent to be sure it is free of odors. Clean your fishing tackle. Don't take smelly foods like bacon or smoked fish with you, and leave scented soaps, lotions, deodorants, toothpaste and other toiletries at home. Smell human, not delicious.

Dogs may attract bears. Leave them at home. Solo campers are more likely to be attacked than members of groups are, so travel with others for safety's sake.

Food attracts bears. Store all foods in sealed plastic bags or airtight containers. Take plenty of extra bags, including enough to double wrap all of your garbage. Carry out all garbage that won't burn. Never bury it.

Firearms: Pros and cons. It is legal to carry firearms in most National Park Service areas in Alaska*. A gun adds weight to your gear, and can be more dangerous to you than bears are if you don't know how to use it. However, a suitable gun, properly used and kept handy, can be a little extra insurance. Rifles larger than .30-06 and 12 gauge shotguns loaded with rifled slugs are adequate. It is legal to shoot a bear in defense of life or property IF you made reasonable efforts to avoid the problem in the first place. The hide of a black bear or the hide and skull of a grizzly must be turned over to state officials immediately.

*Guns are not allowed in Sitka National Historical Park, Glacier Bay and Katmai National Parks or in that part of Denali National Park formerly known as Mt. McKinley National Park.

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PREVENT CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

2.

Make noise. Bears will usually avoid you if they know you're coming. Most attacks occur when people surprise bears at close range. Sows with cubs are particularly dangerous because they tend to see any intruder as a threat to their cubs.

Bears can be well hidden even in knee-high brush. Don't risk sneaking up on one. Talk, rattle pebbles in a can, or wear bells. Remember that wind and running water muffle the noise you make. Entering thickets from upwind may let a bear smell you and move away. Be especially careful and noisy if you must travel through prime bear habitat, such as along salmon streams, through willow thickets, berry patches, and areas with a lot of trails, prints and droppings.

Watch for bear sign (evidence). Tracks are illustrated below. Droppings may look like a cow's, or like a pile of partially digested berries. Bear trails are common along streams, on ridgetops and in berry patches. Watch for torn up patches of soil and vegetation; bears dig up tundra hunting for rodents, roots and bulbs. If you smell decomposing meat or see an animal carcass covered by leaves and branches, leave immediately. You may have found a bear's food cache, and the bear is probably nearby. Always check around potential campsites carefully and, if you find bear sign, consider camping elsewhere.

Don't invite bears into your camp. Keep food odors to a minimum. Cook and eat several hundred yards downwind from your camp or, better yet, cook, eat, and then move on a mile or so to camp. Don't cook more than you can eat, and wash dishes immediately. Dump waste water far from camp, downwind. Store all food, soap and any other smelly items well sealed and far from camp, high in a tree if possible. Keep food and food odors off your clothes. Never sleep in the clothes you cooked or ate in.

If you catch a fish, clean it far from camp. Puncture the air bladder and throw the entrails far out in the water. Clean yourself and your gear carefully before you camp.

IF YOU SEE A BEAR

3.

If you see a bear in the distance, alter your route to avoid it. Move out of its sight downwind if you can. If the bear sees you, it may stand up and sway its head from side to side; it is trying to figure out what you are. Help it! Speak loudly, hold your arms up and back slowly away. If the bear approaches, keep talking. Climb a tree, if possible. If the bear turns sideways to you, or if it pops its teeth together or makes a series of woofs, it is warning you. Retreat slowly. Never run; that could entice the bear to chase you. Never imitate the sounds or postures of a bear; that may challenge it to attack.

If the bear charges you, freeze, facing the bear. Most charges are bluffs: the bear will probably stop, turn and run away. If it does not stop, drop to the ground and play dead, on your stomach or knees-to-chest, with your hands linked across the back of your neck. Leave your pack on. Keep silent and still; the bear may lose interest in you then and leave.

To avoid bear problems, remember and practice the three steps to bear safety: 1) Plan ahead, 2) Prevent close encounters, 3) Know what to do if you do meet a bear. Bear attacks are very rare, but they do occur. If you use common sense and take all precautions, the risk of trouble with bears is really quite small. Enjoy a safe trip here in bear country.